

Letters From My Father
Week 10
1 Timothy 4:1-5
“The Doctrines of Demons”

Introduction

Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God. Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.

*The Apostle Paul's farewell address to elders of the church at Ephesus. **Acts 20:26-31***

When Paul wrote his letters to Timothy, the church at Ephesus was in a bad way spiritually speaking. The very thing that Paul had warned them about years earlier had come to pass. The church had allowed false teachers to come in and distort the truth of God's Word, which is exactly what the enemy does. If he cannot destroy a church outright, he cripples it in such a way as to make the ministry unfruitful. Pulpit sermons that passionately expose sin and teach of God's saving grace and forgiveness are replaced with confusing and meaningless platitudes that offer an alternative that is more palatable to those who wish to live in sin and self-indulgence. In short, the gospel of Christ is replaced with false teaching, and the change is often slow and subtle so that the hapless congregants are none the wiser.

This is the reason that Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, to admonish the church that they had been called and chosen to be “pillars and foundations of the God's truth” (**1 Timothy 3:15**). For apart from God's Word being believed, lived, defended, and taught by the local church, there can be no hope for this fallen world. The consequences are life and death, and that is why Christians must know what they believe and share the message of the gospel with boldness, for Satan loves nothing more than to lure the followers of Christ away from the truth in order to deceive them with lies. This is who he is! And we must ever be on our guard to defend against his wicked schemes (**2 Corinthians 2:11; 1 Peter 5:8; James 4:7**).

After making his case to Timothy in his letter (which was also written for the benefit of the church) as to why it was so vital that every member of the church conduct themselves in a manner worthy of a servant of The Living God in order to become pillars of truth, Paul continued his case by saying that the truth of God's Word is under constant attack. Just as Satan did in the Garden of Eden when he tried to confound Eve as to what God had actually said about the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he still attempts to lure would-be followers of Christ away from the true path of faith. And sadly, his endeavors are often met with little resistance as he drags many potential Christians away from saving faith and into apostasy.

Today, we will be discussing the very schemes that the devil uses to lure people away from the Church of The Living God. He often sends false messengers into the body in an attempt to make once sound doctrine become so convoluted that the truth is difficult to see. Paul called these false teachings “the doctrines of demons” (**1 Timothy 4:1**). And Paul was not the only messenger who warned of such things. Both the Apostle John and even Christ Himself talked of the ways that people are led astray into apostasy.

False teaching has one purpose; to intentionally lead people away from the light and into darkness. And although some false teachers may in fact be unsuspecting pawns in Satan's wicked plans, others know full well that they are misusing God's Word for their own personal gain. These men (and

women) are to be shunned by every Christian. And while it is important that we know their methodology, it is far more vital that we know the truth of God's Word. The devil uses outright *deception*, but he also *dispossesses*, *discourages*, and *distracts* in order to lead people away from God's saving truth.

Deception (vs. 1-5)

Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer. **1 Timothy 4:1-5**

Paul begins this passage by saying that The Holy Spirit expressly or explicitly warned us that in the latter times some will depart from the faith. The Greek word he used that is translated in the CSB as "depart from" is *afistemi* (pronounced af-is'-tay-mee), and it literally means *to distance oneself*, or to purposefully "stand apart" from something. It carries with it the idea that where a person once stood, they have intentionally removed themselves to stand in another place. In this particular context, it describes someone who once claimed to be a follower of Christ but has now departed, or stands apart, from the faith; in other words, an apostate.

There has been a great deal of debate as to whether Paul's use of the term latter times ("*hysteros kairos*" in the Greek) is a reference to the time beginning immediately after Christ's first advent, or the end times before the coming of the anti-christ (**2 Thessalonians 2:1-3**). I would argue that he is actually referring to both. Technically, the latter days, as described in Scripture, would include all of the years between Jesus first and second coming. Paul ministered in this the "age of grace" just as we do today. And from then till now, many have been led astray by the devil into apostasy. But make no mistake, in the last days before Christ's second coming, apostasy will dramatically increase. This is why Paul told the Thessalonians that "*the apostasy*" will precede the coming of anti-christ. His use of the word "*the*" speaks of a specific time when people will abandon the faith as never before.

Even so, we know that the devil has been, and is continuing to dissuade people from following Jesus. And he will do so exponentially as that final day approaches. So it is imperative that we understand exactly what apostasy is, as well as who can commit such a blasphemous act against God. The question always arises within this discussion, "Is an apostate a Christian who has denounced the faith?" And the answer is no. Those who have been truly born again cannot become "un-born again". However, there are many who profess to be followers of Christ, when in reality they are not. They are merely deceiving themselves or have been deceived by the doctrines of demons, as Paul would say.

There are many people who go to church regularly and yet still live as if the devil is in control of their lives. They are convinced that they have been saved, but there is no change that has occurred within them. They claim to know Christ, but the reality of their existence bears witness to the fact that they do not. A tree shall be known by its fruit (**Matthew 7:16-20**), and without the fruit of The Spirit, there is no saving faith. Lost people act like lost people, no matter the name by which they choose to identify themselves. In one of his letters written to Believers (**1 John**), John the Apostle speaks of those who had left the church and become apostates. He states:

Children, it is the last hour. And as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. By this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they belonged to us they would have remained with us. **1 John 2:18-19**

So you see, those who abandon the faith of Christ are not true Believers, they are merely lost people who claimed to have a saving faith when in reality they did not. They were drawn to the gospel, but for whatever reason decided against remaining in Christ. The usual reasoning behind such apostasy, is that people have no interest in the sacrificial living that accompanies salvation. They are more concerned with “having their cake and eating it too”, as it were. Therefore, they are only too willing to accept a more palatable doctrine that better appeals to their sense of self-worth and entitlement. And because of their inner desires for “something different”, the devil always has false teachers standing at the ready to entice them away from the truth. For there is a vast difference between mere belief, and saving faith.

Paul describes the demonic false teachers as men whose consciences have been seared (the actual Greek means cauterized). In other words, the type of man who can lead people astray in order to gain wealth and/or power for themselves no longer has a conscience to keep him in check. Their own selfish lusts have long since burned away any sense of moral accountability. Don't think for a moment that the greedy televangelist, who bilks people out of their worldly possessions, ever lies awake at night feeling guilty for what he (or she) has done. They are long past having compassion for others. These demonically inspired “preachers” live only to themselves. People, to them, are simply a means to an end.

The church of Ephesus had more than one brand of false teaching. There was Gnosticism, as well as, Jewish Asceticism. Both appealed to the fleshly desires of men, but in different ways. Gnosticism appeased the sensual nature of the flesh with its indulgence in immorality, while the Judaizers appealed to men's sense of arrogant pride by teaching that a person could work out their own “works-based salvation” by adhering to an impossible set of man-made rules and standards.

Some of the false teachers at Ephesus had gone so far as to tell the people that in order to become truly “spiritual” they must never marry and to strictly fast and abstain from certain foods. Paul reminded the people that it was God Who instituted marriage and declared it to be good (**Genesis 2:18-24**), and it was also God Who has declared all food to be good as well (**Mark 7:14-19**). Therefore, rather than revile the very things that God has declared to be good, we should instead embrace them with thanksgiving. What The Word of God says is good... *is* good! And God's Word should always be honored far above the vain jangling of foolish deceiving men.

The false teacher's deception is for the sole purpose of leading men away from the truth. Jesus Himself addressed apostasy in His “*Parable of the Sower*”. This story gives us great insight as to why some people are never truly converted, but instead, are easily drawn away from the faith by the “doctrines of demons.”

Then he told them many things in parables, saying, “Consider the sower who went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seed fell on rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. Still other seed fell on good ground and produced fruit: some a hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown. Let anyone who has ears listen.”
Matthew 13:3-9

Bearing this in mind, in addition to false teaching, let us discuss other methods which Satan employs in order to lead people astray. His *Deceptive* tactics include *Dispossession*, *Dissolution*, and *Distraction*, and all have proven to be quite effective in beguiling unsuspecting people into apostasy. So the question that I have for you today is simple: How's your dirt? Allow me to expound further on the subject.

Dispossession (Matthew 13:18-19)

“So listen to the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path.”
Matthew 13:18-19

The quickest and easiest way for the devil to rob us of the truth of God's Word is to snatch it away from our thoughts as quickly as possible. There are a million ways that the enemy can dispossess us of the truth found in God's Word. Have you ever listened to a sermon, or tried to read a passage of Scripture, only to have a million interruptions that take your mind elsewhere? I cannot tell you how many times that I have been praying or studying only to have the phone, car horns, doorbells, or a million other distractions tear me away from The Scriptures. Can I get a witness?

Here is the simple truth of the matter. Satan does not want you to have any knowledge of God's Word. And he will do anything in his power to snatch it away from you as quickly as possible. Jesus spoke of this in His parable. When a person hears (or even tries to listen to) The Word of God, the devil does not want to let it sink in. So he comes in like a thief to steal it away from our minds.

A person can become so blinded by their own sinfulness, that the gospel makes no sense to them. They do not even comprehend that they are in need of saving, much less to turn away from their sin in repentance. And before they can even wrap their heads around the notion, the devil distracts them to direct their attention elsewhere. These are the people that Jesus described the "soil" of their hearts as being packed down so hard that the seeds of truth cannot penetrate. The Word of God has no effect upon them whatsoever, so the "seed", as it were, just bounces off. The devil does not allow it to take root. This kind of person is not even an apostate, for they never had a chance to believe in the first place.

Discouragement (Matthew 13:20-21)

And the one sown on rocky ground — this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away.

Matthew 13:20-21

Now we come to those who are apostate (abandon the faith). And this, my friend, is also where the false teachers often enter into the equation. When a so-called "preacher" presents the gospel in such a way as to make it seem easy or even prosperous, many people can get really excited about following Jesus. This is why some churches have massive congregations. The common denominator of most, if not all, so called "mega-churches" is that they offer a message that appeals to a person's flesh, as opposed to their soul. This, by the way, is nothing new. They even had these kind of "prosperity gospel" preachers in Paul's day!

If anyone teaches false doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our LORD Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain. 1 Timothy 6:3-5

The false prophets lay it on thick, promising that God wants you to have health and wealth and everything your selfish heart desires. They cherry pick certain passages of Scripture that speak of God's rich blessings all the while avoiding the tougher passages regarding repentance and sacrifice like the proverbial plague. And when it becomes obvious that these conscience-seared charlatans cannot deliver upon all that they promise and life becomes difficult (as life often does), many are discouraged and fall away from the faith. For the faith that they had professed was a fantasy to begin with. These are they whose soil of the heart is rocky ground. Jesus has called us to a life of selflessness, not to self-ishness.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

Matthew 16:24

To be a follower of Christ is to be despised by the world and to face many trials which are necessary to refine us into the image of Christ. This is most definitely *not* the perpetual indulgence that the false teachers promise. No wonder their hapless victims fall away in times of discouragement! How many have been dissuaded from the truth by these perverse hypocrites? It is hard to even fathom the fiery condemnation these “teachers” will receive at The Great White Throne of Judgment!

Distractions (Matthew 13:22)

Now the one sown among the thorns — this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. **Matthew 13:22**

Another way the devil is able to drive a person to apostasy is by the cares of this world. If he can cause us to become so focused upon “making it” (what ever *it* is) in this world, then he can distract us so that we can never make it into heaven. This is what Jesus meant when he spoke of “the deceitfulness of wealth” that chokes out the world. The devil distracts our attention using our own selfish lusts to entice us away from the things that are eternal and significant to the things that are temporary and superficial. He does this so that we will become so caught up in the things of this world that we lose sight of the kingdom of heaven. I cannot tell you how many people that I have encountered over the years who started out with a seemingly sincere desire to follow Christ, only to become “choked out” by life’s diversions.

Enter once again the false teacher, who proclaims that God wants you to have financial wealth. They misuse verse after verse to convince you that what really matters to God in heaven is that you are successful down here on earth. Jesus died so that we might be with Him in fellowship forever, and that begins with following Him down here, my friends! If you are so distracted by seeking riches here on earth, then you have no time for storing up treasures in heaven (**Matthew 6:19-24**). This passage concludes with Jesus famous words:

No one can serve two masters, since he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. **Matthew 6:24**

So there you have it my brothers and sisters. Do not be deceived by the doctrines of demons. But hold fast to the truth of God’s Word. Let it take root in your hearts, so that you will not be seduced by the devil’s lies. God desires to have you, and that means all of you. He is not interested in a part-time lordship position in your life. He wants to be your reason for living. He wants you to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And He will settle for nothing less. We were created to worship and serve Him, not the other way around. The false prophets will never preach this truth. They would rather make themselves rich by telling the masses what they want to hear. They speak lies, but God’s truth remains forever. So I ask you this question once more: How’s your dirt?

But the one sown on good ground — this is one who hears and understands The Word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown. **Matthew 13:23**

My prayer for you this morning is that you not be drawn away or enticed by the doctrines of demons, but rather, you will be firmly rooted in God’s Word so that you may have life everlasting. The pleasures of this life are fleeting, but God’s kingdom is eternal. So above all else, desire His truth!

And let those whose heart’s possess the rich soil of saving faith all say... TRUTH!